

January 3, 2010  
Matthew 2: 1-12  
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Happy New Year is still freshly ringing in our ears. People we meet and greet are still wishing one another a Happy New year but we know that soon this comment will be in the past and the routine of the day will return with few wishes for joy in the future.

Our scripture reading today is the story of the visit from the Magi. You may remember from last week we learned a bit about the Magi when we talked about the hymn We Three Kings but this week we'll dig a little deeper to find the significance of their visit for us today.

The Magi were Persian astrologers, probably from Babylonia, or perhaps from Egypt or Arabia. These astrologers have noticed an important sign in the sky, and so they have followed that star to the place where they should find a king, for these kinds of appearances in the sky often indicated the birth of some dignitary.

As I said last week, there's nothing to indicate that the Magi were actually kings themselves. Later on in the Christian tradition, under the influence of Psalm 72 and Isaiah 49 and 60, these Magi begin to be referred to as kings, which is why our Nativity sets show them all wearing crowns and since Matthew mentions three gifts it is assumed there are three of them. In the late sixth century the Armenian Infancy Gospel give these Magi the names we know them as today - Melchior, Balthasar, and Gaspar. (Schweizer, p. 38 and Hill, pp. 81-82)

Back to the visit of the Magi, Herod is not pleased. The Magi turn up at his palace looking for the baby king and instead find Herod who is very interested in finding out where exactly this baby is located. Herod, of course is threatened by this new king and so frantically plots to destroy this ruler who threatens his throne.

As part of the plan he invites the Magi to a secret meeting. Now, I don't know about you but secret meetings always mean trouble. You should always be leery of secret meetings. However, the Magi attend the meeting and listen to what Herod has to say. "Go and search for the child," Herod tells the Magi. "I want to worship him, too." Herod has no intension of worshipping this baby. He has no gifts to offer or bring to this baby king. He intends only to use the Magi as pawns in his hidden agenda that he secretly wishes to fulfill; that is killing the baby king. "When you find him," he says to them, "get back to me so that I can worship him too."

And so the Magi leave Herod and follow the star until it stops over the place where the child was. And Matthew tells us in no uncertain terms that "when they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy."

It is here in this place of joy that the Magi recognize they have been duped by Herod. It is in this joy that the contrast of good and evil is felt. This feeling of joy is so right and the feeling from the secret meeting now feels so wrong. It is here in the joy that the Magi had the feeling inside that you get when you know it is right.

Have you ever felt that feeling? That feeling of overwhelming joy? Of course you have at some time or another. You know that feeling that comes within yourself where you say to yourself, "Ahh, I'm home, this is good. This is how I should feel. This is how my life should be." This feeling of deep joy is God's gift to us and whenever you feel it you can be sure it is a moment that God has given to you out of love and goodness and grace. It is here that you know you are meant to be.

Rev. Mark Sargent explains it like this: A moment when you felt so at home in your own skin, so at one with yourself and everything, that you knew the place at which you had arrived is the place where you belong. A moment when you can say, "This is me. This is why I'm alive. This is who I am. This is where I am meant to be." A moment when the star you've been following stops and you find yourself overwhelmed with the joy that comes from being you. That's the moment God wishes for all of us.

What if in the new year all of life could be the delightful experience of being flooded by and overwhelmed with joy? That joy happens, when like the Magi, we find ourselves at the place where we can freely and truly be who we really and truly are. Where is that joy place for you?

That's not as easy a question to answer as it may seem, because our lives are often not characterized by such joy. Our lives often reflect something other than the experience of being overwhelmed with joy?

Do you live your life outside of the self God has given you? Do you spend most of your life trying to be something others expect you to be and not who you really are? Many people do, perhaps many more than you might expect. It is easy to find examples of such lives lived. Think about it for a moment. Did you do or are you doing with your life what you really wanted to do? If you have you are lucky. Have you marched to the beat of your own drummer or have you been re-routed to march to the beat of another drum.

It is not uncommon to hear people say they feel like they are living for everybody else; or that they feel like they have lost themselves along the way. The Magi found such joy because they realized they were at a place where the divine and human meet. That intersection that brings such joy.

They also realized that they had a decision to make; they had told Herod they would tell him where they found the new king and now that they had felt this joy they knew Herod's plan could not be to come and worship. Herod was not that kind of ruler. He was vicious and uncaring; after all he had killed his own family imagine what he might do to the Magi who do not obey him. They are stuck between two kings – one of joy and one of fear; they must choose between the delight of one and the fear of the other.

This is an analogy for our lives today for this is so true for most of us. Do we choose delight or fear, moving forward or going backward; afraid to grow and afraid not to grow.

Herod has as many faces as we have problems and decisions that keep us from being who we truly are. It is Herod who keeps you from living your dreams, and finding your true light and leads you away from that overwhelming joy that God wants you to have.

Today, for us, Epiphany is about finding our own God-centre; Being who God intended us to be; Living in the joy that comes from being so filled with our own light as a gift from God, that the star stops here. Epiphany is to show forth, manifest. It is a moment of sudden intuitive understanding; a flash of insight. The Magi had this epiphany when they reached the place where the star stopped and found there the joy they could not explain but could feel. When they knew in that moment the difference between good and bad; the difference between open love and hidden agendas and they chose to go home by another way and to not return to Herod.

Our epiphany comes when we are so closely linked with God that our light and God's light are one. Each week we light the Christ candle to remind us that we are one in this light with God. The Christ child came and was worshipped by the Magi to teach us to follow that light that comes from God and ultimately leads to God. This light comes with the hope, peace, joy and love that we anticipated throughout Advent and Christmas. This light is here among us. Let it shine through each of us this day.

Amen